Since becoming acquainted with the works of Etty Hillesum, I have been drawn to and impressed by the way she merges her way of thinking with her life experience. Philosophy of Education and Pedagogy of Expression are disciplines which constantly look for new thinkers who are able to plumb the depths of human interiority, men and women who will catch its magnificence and give us back its meaningfulness. Thanks to her existential path, I believe that Hillesum has something to offer to both disciplines.

In the Philosophy of Education literature, it is said that “what is human is communicated through what is human.”¹ In pursuing this thought, I was enchanted by Hillesum’s path of existential communication. I believe her message transcends space and time and reaches those who are ready to welcome it.

For those who make humane education an integral part of their research, Hillesum’s insights are valuable. She is able to get in touch with the depths of our being. She crosses frontiers and discovers the common essence of every single person. Moreover, after identifying such essence, she offers it to everyone, who, like her, is keen on human mystery and its expression. On 24 September 1942, she writes:

> With a sharp pang, all of suffering mankind’s nocturnal distress and loneliness passes now through my small heart. What shall I be taking upon myself this winter? “One day, I would love to travel through all the world, oh God; I feel drawn right across all frontiers and feel a bond with all Your warring creatures.” And I would like to proclaim that bond in a small, still voice but also compellingly and without pause. But first I must be present on every battlefront and at the centre of all human suffering. Then I will surely have the right to speak out?²

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² E.T., 531 [my emphasis]. Etty, 562–563: Alle nachtelijke nooden en eenzaamheden van een lijdende mensheid trekken nu plotseling met een weeë pijn door dat éne kleine hart van mij. Wat ben ik toch van plan deze winter op me te nemen? Later wil ik gaan reizen door de verschillende landen van jouw wereld, mijn God, ik voel
I would like to reflect on two mysterious inner movements which gradually take shape in Hillesum: to feel life and to communicate life.

Recently, I worked with other three researchers on a book that deals with the mystery of human communication. Our goal was to identify thinkers who developed a powerful way to feel life which is able to bear—what I would call—contagion of humanity, to spread humanity. I am convinced that the existential path of Etty Hillesum leads to an effective contagion of humanity.

The excerpt from Hillesum’s diary that I would like to use here, as a reference point for my work, is dated 19 June 1942:

Though I probably have no talent for writing, I do have a talent, if one may call it that, for experiencing everything a human being can experience and feel and suffer, not just in my own way but also like many others [...] I cannot write, but I experience life, body and soul, from minute to minute, with all its twists and turns and colours and sounds. I experience people, and I also experience the suffering of people. And from that experience, words may one day laboriously wrestle their way up to the surface, words I shall have to pronounce and that spring from so true a source that they are bound to find their way. Perhaps they will be very clumsy words, but they will have to be said. I am, in fact, afraid of a certain facility in my writing. I think I may have that, but I resent it because it stops me from getting at the things that really matter. I shall no doubt find my own words, or rather my words will perhaps find me one day—my experience will perhaps one day encounter the words that will liberate it. I cannot write but I can certainly live. And words are sure to be born one day out of my true living.